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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0318 05/04/01

~ Web Sales Tax Mulled! ~ People Are Talking! ~ ERS Now Shareware!
~ Napster Meaning Holds! ~ GFA Basic Challenge! ~ Luna Text Compiler!

~ Let Game Wars Begin! ~ Free Software Threat! ~ MyMail Update Out!
~ Surprise: It's Win2002 ~ New Chip Technology! ~ PaCidemo Area Updated

-* Surprise, It's Windows 2002! *-
-* Internet Privacy: Just An Oxymoron? *-
-* Napster Replaces Apology With A Warning! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, the warm weather is upon us, finally! It may even be a little too hot (a couple of record temperatures already this week), but I'm not complaining! The yard is almost clean, but I still have a little brush to clean up. Some flowers are blooming, the grass has turned green, and the trees are budding. This weekend should be productive with my finishing up some of the clean-up and getting ready for more planting. My favorite time of the year!

I was down in Maine last weekend to see my father and his new puppy. I still can't believe that my brother got him a puppy - a pit bull puppy! I have to admit, it's a gorgeous dog and really playful. I just hope that he stays that way! It was to be in Maine again and to see my father. He's doing well, for those of you who have asked. Me too. I hope to have him up here for a visit when I take some time off at the end of the month.

It's been fairly quiet this week, at home and at work. Probably the calm before the proverbial storm! It's nice though; I hope it lasts for awhile. And, I have a much-needed and long-awaited vacation in a few weeks, so that's something to look forward to have.

Until next time...

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Eric Reboux Software Available Via Europe Shareware

Eric Reboux Software (http://ers.free.fr) is now in the Shareware Europe catalog. The 1st program to join the list is WinFrame, a new windframe for MagiC (6 and up).

This one is a rewritten one, allowing more customization than just a redesign of the widgets.

Coming soon: Find It, Direct (a new desktop).

http://ers.free.fr

LTC Available Via Europe Shareware

Hi all,

The text compiler for Luna is available.

This software is a companion program for Luna. It is able to manage projects including several text files (programming, webmastering...). Registration is now possible via Europe Shareware and the price is 17.00 Euros.

More info:

http://www.europe-shareware.org/atari/logiciels/ltc.html

Bye,

P. Ricard (ES)

PaCidemo Area - Totally Revamped

The website about SainT & ST demos has been updated:

- The design has been modified.
- New sections (FAQ about SainT, listing by name of authors) and more demos have been added.
- Today, the site offers 170 Mb of ST demos. Hope it will reach 200 Mb before the holidays.

http://pacidemo.atari.org

STELLA v2.7 Beta (Image Database) Available

Sven Steinbeck reports on http://www.atari-home.de/ that a beta version of STELLA 2.7 is now available at

http://www.thomaskuenneth.de/download/beta1.lzh

More information (in german) can be found at

http://www.thomaskuenneth.de/de_stella.html .

STELLA is a picture database for managing large collections of images.

Not to be confused with Stella (http://www4.ncsu.edu:8030/~bwmott/2600/) an open source atari VCS 2600 emulator.

New Telnet BBS on Real Atari!

Greetings all!

Well, I have put my TT030 to good use, installed Linux on it, wrote a new BBS program for it and connected it to the net.

Check it out by telnetting to jybolac.dyndns.org on port 520. Here is the URL as well:

telnet://jybolac.dyndns.org:520.

You will be logging in to my TT directly.

If you would like to join the BBS, log in as user 'new'. I am still working on several of the features, like allowing the user to define preferences and menu styles, but I would like to open it up to everyone. And, all comments and suggestions are welcome. Since I wrote the software myself, I can change anything easily. I am hoping that the software will work under MiNT as well as Linux, but that has not been tested yet as I don't have MiNT.

Thanks, Chris

http://jybolac.virtualave.net
telnet://jybolac.dyndns.org:520

GEM GFA-Basic Editor Challenge

This is a programming challenge to anyone who can come up with a routine that will convert ASCII into GFA-Basic's tokenized file format.

The idea is simple. I take pledges from users who are willing to donate to this cause. Whoever ends up coding this routine will be given all the pledges. The goal is to then use this routine to create a new GEM based Editor for GFA-Basic.

Please see the site for rules and other information:
http://www.bright.net/~atari/html/gfa_gem.htm"

GSExec v 1.30 Released

GSExec the Gem Script Executor is now up to version 1.30. Recent changes include an expanded run time library and support for dialogue boxes and Popup menus.

URL: http://www.netcologne.de/~nc-beckerha3/gsexecd.htm

(translated into English via free translations)
http://fets3.freetranslation.com:5081/?Language=German%2FEnglish&Url=www.netcol

ogne.de%2F%7Enc-beckerha3%2Fgsexecd.htm&Sequence=core

AtarIRC v 1.16 Available

Lonny Pursell reports on http://www.atari.org that he has released a version 1.16 of AtarIRC.

Main change is a bug fix for a situation that occurs under Geneva.

URL: http://www.bright.net/~atari

MyMail Version 1.30 Released

New version of MyMail (1.30) at erik's homepage.

- Lots of bugfixes
- Faster code
- New popup menus

URL: http://www2.tripnet.se/~erikhall/programs/mymail.html

UPX 1.08 Has Been Released - Featuring a Native Port to Atari/TOS

HETSET reports on http://www.atari.org ...

UPX is a free, portable, extendable, high-performance executable packer for several different executable formats. It achieves an excellent compression ratio and offers very fast decompression. Your executables suffer no memory overhead or other drawbacks."

The 1.08a version feature now a native port to atari/tos.

URL: http://upx.sourceforge.net/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors.. Another week has come and gone, and Mother Nature has decided to give Uncle Dana a taste of what he's anxious for... SUMMER.

For my part, I can't wait for this hot weather to subside a little bit and for spring to be like it's supposed to be... gradually getting warmer so that you can ease into summer. There's nothing worse than going from unseasonably cold weather to unseasonably warm weather.

Spring will also give me a chance to work on my latest project. I mentioned a while back that I was going to make my own telescope, right

down to grinding the mirror myself. Well, I've got just about everything I need to get started on the mirror and all I really need is the time to get going on it.

I joined an email list dealing with making telescopes. I'm amazed that there are so many people interested in making telescopes instead of just buying one.

There are all kinds of things that you need to know and all kinds of things you have to take into account. But, as with most things in life, there are usually many ways of achieving the same result. And also as with most things in life, there are those who completely ignore every possible avenue to the desired end except for their own.

It really struck me as odd that within this group of pilgrims upon the path less travelled there are those who simply cannot countenance any method other than their own. I won't get into any of the particulars because I know that, while it may sound like an incredibly cool project to me, others simply don't care about making a telescope. And that's fine. That's what makes us what we are. There's nothing wrong with thinking 'different'. As a matter of fact, that's what causes progress. Socrates, DaVinci, Edison, and Einstein all thought 'different'. Different is not always right. Different is not always wrong. It simply IS.

The whole situation reminded me of the computer world. It's not just the "My OS is better than your OS" thing, but the "This program is better than that program" thing as well. I sometimes think that we've all forgotten about individuality and personal preference.

Try this sometime: Do something you normally do, but try doing it in a different way. Take another route to work; pan fry those porkchops instead of using that breaded coating. Just do something to keep your mind from turning to cement. Our minds are like the rest of our being... they get stuck in a rut and get comfortable. Comfort is the worst thing that can happen to intellect. The most creative solutions normally come out when all the "usual" stuff fails or there is no other option.

Well, I'll step down off my soapbox now so that we can get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Hallvard Tangeraas asks for opinions about which computer to use:

"I need some help determining which ST I should get for a project of mine involving taking the main board out of the casing, adding all sorts of additional hardware (MIDI and other stuff), then finally placing it all inside a 19" rack case. This is going to be my specialized MIDI computer, but will of course be used as a standard ST as well.

Now, I had planned on using a Mega-ST 4 for this purpose which I have, and contains a built in IDE controller, but as there's no DMA sound (and most sample playback software needs DMA capable hardware) as well as hearing that many early Megas had problems with their cartridge port I'm considering getting another machine for the project instead.

The choice it seems lies between an STe or a Mega STe (forget the TT or Falcon as the MIDI software I'm going to use only runs on STs).
As I've never actually used a Mega STe I need some help from someone who has, so I can figure out if it really is something I can use.
A comparison between the two shows these differences:

Mega STE	STE
8/16MHz	8MHz
16K cache	-
68881/82 co-processor	-
separate kbd	- (will use Mario Becroft's QWERTYX with a PC keyboard/mouse)
clock	- (will add a "Mega clock" board inside)
VME-bus	-
HD disk drive	- (will build a HD/DD interface and use an AJAX controller instead of the WD-1772)
2 x modem ports	- 1 x modem port (19.2Kbaud), but fitted with "RSVE" to increase its speed. (will add an ST_ESSC board which gives me two additional modem ports: "modem-2" and "serial-2"
1 x high speed serial or LAN port	-

That, it seems, are the main differences, now let's go through these features one by one:

a) 8/16MHz vs. 8MHz speed
"Notator SL" which I'm using for MIDI sequencing can only run at 8MHz anyway, but does the 16MHz mode really make it such a faster machine for applications which can handle it? Is it worth having?

b) 16 Kbyte cache
I take it this also improves the speed, but does it make a big change? Again, Notator SL needs to have this switched off, so it's only useful for other applications in my case.

c) possibility to add a 68881/68882 co-processor.
What is this actually used for? I guess that the software needs specific support for this processor? What kind of software is it useful for? Number crunching applications perhaps?

d) VME-bus
I don't know much about this other than it can house a graphic card like the one Mario Becroft is working on, to get hires colours.
Again, this is of no use with most MIDI software (Notator SL needs standard hires mono), and all in all it's pretty expensive.
For viewing colour pictures I have my Apple Macintosh anyway, so I'm in no desperate need to get hires colour support for the ST.
But if I was to use such a card, what kind of applications would support it?

e) Two modem ports
I'm a little confused here as the specs I've found don't say anything about what kind of serial ports are used on the Mega STe. Speed? Port

names? Connector types?
I've already gotten hold of an "ST_ESSC" board which gives me an additional 2 modem ports on any ST.
"Serial-2" (115200 baud) and "Modem-2" (38400 baud) with those small 9-pin connectors (not sure if those are the correct speeds, but I think so).

In addition to this I also have this "RSVE" circuit which will connect to the standard STe modem port making it possible to use higher speed modems than the 19200 baud limit given by the original design.
Not sure if the speed limit is 38400 or 115200 baud.

My question to all of this: with the mentioned hardware solutions: what will the differences be to a Mega STe?

f) High-speed serial port or LAN port.
What does this mean? Is there a switch on the back of the machine where you choose to use it as either a third modem port, or as a LAN port?
Which modem port are we talking about? Serial-1? Modem-1?
And what can the LAN port be used for? Are there any practical applications for this? Could I for example connect my Apple Mac and the Mega STe together to transfer data between them?

If yes, is there a way to do this with extra hardware in the STe?

So all in all, what do you suggest I do?"

Frank Szymanski tells Hallvard:

"Be careful. There are early MSTEs that don't have the necessary AJAX chip to support a HD drive and more important they need a replacement GAL chip which is very hard to find nowadays (perhaps BEST has some of them). So try to find one of the MSTEs that already have HD support included.

And some STEs/MSTEs have a wrong chip that produces noisy DMA-sound. I once had such a machine and it was very annoying. It took some time to find out what causes this sound and then it took some extra money to replace the chip (fortunately they are all socketed).

If you do not plan to upgrade your system (processor upgrade) I would recommend the MSTE, in any other case try to get a STE instead. BTW, I had both machines."

Joseph Place asks about the difference between 50 and 60 Hz:

"I was wondering if someone would explain the 50Hz/60Hz video on the STE. I am not a very "high tech" atari user, but I am using my revived STE for most everything now (internet, etc.), and having a great time with it.

I have found that there are several programs that will cause the video to scroll, unless I use a 60Hz patch, but this does not work for all programs. I haven't been able to find a lot of information on this."

Patrice Mandin tells Joseph:

"50/60hz refresh rate is set at address 0xFFFF820A, bit 1.
bit 1 = 0 for 50hz

bit 1 = 1 for 60hz

...GEM programs do not change it, only games and demo
set it for their needs. If your video is scrolling, it means your
monitor does not support one of the frequency. Recent TV support both
rates."

Erlend Pettersen asks about printer drivers for Calamus:

"I recently bought a second hand Atari Falcon 030, with loads of
equipment.

Among the programs that came with it, was Calamus 98 SL (or something
similar). It's a nice program, which I would like to use a lot more.

However, I have no way of outputting stuff from it; I don't have a
suitable printer-driver for it. In other words, I need a printer-driver
for my Star LC-10. Does anyone know where I can get one?

As an alternative, can I "print" to Postscript or PDF-files instead, and
then print them out using my Windows-based computer? (This would be a
preferred solution, in fact, since I could occasionally my friends
ink-based printers instead of my old, noisy but reliable dot-matrix
printer.)

I know very little about Atari-computers, so please keep your replies on
an understandable, not-too technical level."

Ken Springer tells Erlend:

"I don't know anything about Star printers. Does the LC-10 emulate any
of the supported printers?

If you have the correct module, you can "export" your file as a
postscript file. But it will have to be printed on a printer that
understands postscript commands. I've only had to do this once, so I
don't know how reliable it currently is. My project was rather simple."

Erlend asks Ken:

"What module do I need to export it? I have a program on the PC that
lets me print Postscript-files on regular printers."

Ken replies:

"You need the Bridge module. I haven't kept up with Calamus
development, but I sure would like to own the current version. SL98 is the last

version I purchased, only money has kept me from buying a newer version.

As someone posted here, it's a tough program to learn. I started with
version 1.06, and it took me two weeks to get the printer to print
something. <G> But if you want printing power that blows word
processors away, this is a great program for that.

It all depends on what you want to do. If you want to do term papers,
letters, mass mailing using mail merge, I'd recommend Papyrus. (I've
got version 5 of that program.) But if you want to do professional
output, such as small magazines, multi-page newsletters, Calamus and

DA’s Layout is the only way to go these days on this platform, it seems to me. And I don’t think Layout is being developed any more, although I have used it for certain projects where it was better suited than Calamus.

At least Calamus is still being developed, and it is available for Windows and Macs."

Al Hartman asks about using a ZIP drive:

"Is there some shareware or commercial driver to allow a ZIP 100 to work on an Atari ST?

This may be the least expensive solution for me to get a working mass storage solution for my ST.

I have never been able to win an Auction on eBay for a HDD or ICD Controller. People just bid them up a little too high."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, the author of HD Driver, tells Al:

"You need additional hardware for that. Woller Systems sells a ROM port adapter for this purpose.

If I remember the price correctly this is not cheaper than using a SCSI adapter for the ACSI port. And it is definitely much slower as far as transfer rates are concerned."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Let The Game Wars Begin!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Gauntlet Dark Legacy!
  Dragon Warrior VII!
  And much much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Let the Game Wars Begin

Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft want to take gaming into the mainstream, and

they'll fight it out along the way.

Whether consumers like it or not, millions of them perhaps even you will soon find themselves in the middle of a full-fledged war. It will be a battle for the hearts and minds and pocketbooks of all those interested, even mildly so, in playing video games on high-tech consoles plugged into their television sets.

The first real salvo was fired by Sony about six months ago when it released Play Station 2, at the time the most advanced game console on the planet. Early this year, Microsoft offered a preview of its entry, Xbox, which promises to be even more powerful.

And when video game makers and retailers meet next month in Los Angeles for the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, Nintendo is scheduled to unveil its latest and most powerful game machine, GameCube. It is being primed to challenge PlayStation 2 and Xbox when all three consoles, each with unique features and capabilities, fight it out this fall during the holiday buying season.

The three companies are preparing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to promote their game machines, with Microsoft alone declaring that it will spend $500 million over an 18-month period to market Xbox.

"Ultimately, this is going to be a very competitive environment," said Robert Kotick, co-chairman and chief executive of Activision Inc., a major maker of video game software. "And I think the amounts of money that will be spent among all three companies on marketing and advertising is going to create awareness and interests and have a lot of new consumers coming into the marketplace."

The struggle has already claimed a high- profile casualty. Sega Enterprises, a pioneer in the $7.4-billion-a-year video game industry, announced earlier this year that it would stop making its Dreamcast game console. But even with Sega out of the picture, the battle among Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft is looming as the biggest ever in the industry.

PlayStation 2, a $299 black box with a heavily machined look, is a known quantity. By the fall it will have been on the market for about a year and will have, by far, the deepest inventory of games. Sony executives note that game developers, many with a loyal following, are designing second-generation games that take significantly more advantage of Play Station 2's capabilities. Some game industry analysts say that could provide an important advantage over competitors that will reach the market with only their own first- generation games.

Sony, which has sold about 2.7 million PlayStation 2 consoles in North America and another 7 million overseas, seems committed to relatively older players. Play Station 2 is the only game console that can play DVD movies right out of the box, for example. And both the console's styling and the types of games offered action-adventure, role-playing, sports seem geared to teenagers and young adults.

Xbox, which is bulkier than PlayStation 2, exudes a sort of no-nonsense quality, which generally appeals to teenage boys and young adults, video game experts say. And Microsoft executives acknowledge that Xbox, which is expected to cost about $300, is aimed at players 16 to 25 the same demographic group that has been playing the company's games on PC's.

Xbox's internal architecture makes it the most powerful game console

coming to market this year. It can play DVD movies, too, but only with the help of a low-cost add-on package. Microsoft also announced recently that Xbox would be able to play its games in Digital Dolby 5.1, a feature designed to impress older players, who are most likely to have the audio hardware to take full advantage of it. And Xbox has advanced features for online game play.

On the other hand, Nintendo, which has had much of its success with younger players pre-teenagers and teenagers who gravitate to its Pokemon games rather than the harder-core games available on its competitors' machines appears to be positioning GameCube for a similar market.

For one thing, the console's boxy look somewhat resembles a child's lunchbox with its strap handle, and prototypes have been shown in bright colors. (In fact, the design has been criticized. Frank O'Connor, executive producer of DailyRadar.com, an influential online gaming news site, said it looked childish, like "Barney's handbag.")

The console is expected to cost $150 to $200. It will not play DVD movies or audio CD's, as the other game consoles will.

While executives for all three console makers said they recognized that their machines would have core audiences, all said that their companies wanted to expand those audiences. The industry's holy grail is to make video games mainstream entertainment; they want the game console to become as ubiquitous an add-on for television sets as the videocassette recorder.

This is the era, said Billy Pidgeon, an analyst for Jupiter Media Metrix, an Internet research company, in which the gaming industry is "bringing video gaming to the mainstream rather than the niche gamer."

But many consumers, and even the most dedicated video game players, say that all the frantic positioning, claims and counterclaims about what the consoles can actually do are making them uncomfortably anxious.

"It kind of makes you crazy," said Rodney Smith, a 27-year-old video game player who was one of the first people to buy last holiday season's hard-to-find PlayStation 2. Mr. Smith, who lives in the Bronx and works at a Starbucks coffee shop in Manhattan, said he was taking a hard look at whether to buy an Xbox when it was released in the fall. "It comes down to one thing," he said. "You want to have the best machine that can play the best games."

Ah, yes, the games. Even executives within the three companies acknowledge that the differences among the consoles expressed in terms like processor speed and polygon rates may mean less than the quality of the games they play.

Jim Merrick, the technology director at Nintendo, said the individual machine's specifications "mean nothing to the end user." Game consoles that are promoted as having very powerful components can turn out to be "somewhat less than the sum of their parts," he added.

Perrin Kaplan, vice president for corporate affairs for Nintendo in the United States, said the relationship between the console hardware and the games it plays was much like the relationship between a movie theater and the films it shows.

"People go to a theater because they want to see a certain movie," Ms. Kaplan said. That, she added, bodes well for Nintendo because the company

has made many of its most successful games itself.

Ms. Kaplan said the GameCube would be a "mass consumer product" that was expected to take advantage of Nintendo’s well- known knack for producing games, like the Mario and Pok mon series, that feature memorable (and marketable) characters.

Nintendo also appears committed to departing from its practice of packaging its games in cartridges for the new machine. Instead, GameCube will use a proprietary DVD system developed by Matsushita, the parent company of Panasonic. The optical disc system uses a three-inch disc, much smaller in size and storage capacity than a standard DVD optical disc, which is used for both PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

While using the Matsushita optical disc system is expected to lower the overall production cost of the GameCube significantly, it also prevents the machine from doubling as a player of DVD movies and audio CD’s.

But the GameCube is expected to pack a number of tricks that its competitors will not have. One of the most compelling, company officials said, will use Nintendo’s vastly improved GameBoy, called GameBoy Advance and scheduled for release in the United States on June 11. GameCube has been designed to permit GameBoy Advance players to plug directly into GameCube. Once the stand-alone, hand-held GameBoy Advance is linked, it can function like a super game controller, Mr. Merrick said.

Joe Fielder, the Internet site director for Gamespot.com, an online game magzine, said the game console maker that can either produce or line up highly successful game designers to produce hits, preferably exclusive ones, was most likely to triumph. In that respect, Mr. Fielder said, Nintendo has some advantages as the maker of iconic games like the Mario and Zelda titles.

But good games with popular characters are not everything. Sonic the Hedgehog, for example, could not save Sega. In recent months, Nintendo has also been courting older players with more risqu games like Conker’s Bad Fur Day.

Other game analysts and makers say that Microsoft’s Xbox has built-in advantages for game designers, especially those who have successfully designed games for the large personal computer market. According to some PC game developers who have used DirectX, a graphics standard that Microsoft developed for PC games, it is relatively simple to design games for Xbox, which uses a variation of DirectX.

Some game developers say that it is difficult to design games for PlayStation 2. Jack Tretton, senior vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment America, recently conceded that it might be difficult to write game code for PlayStation 2. "Anything very good is difficult," he said.

But whether or not they were difficult to design, a slew of PlayStation 2 games that industry watchers say may be some of the best ever made for any console are scheduled for release late this year, just when the game console war is expected to be at its most combative. They include Solid Gear Metal 2: Sons of Liberty, by Konami, and DOA 3: Hardcore, by Tecmo.

When Mr. Pidgeon, the analyst, was asked if he could pick a probable winner, all he could say was, "Right now, it’s up in the air."

Time-Honored Franchise Returns With Gauntlet Dark Legacy

Exclusive Four-Player Cooperative Gameplay and Dynamic New Features Recreate Gauntlet Series

Midway Games Inc. announced that Gauntlet Dark Legacy, a 3D version of the Gauntlet videogame franchise, shipped to retail on May 1 for the PlayStationfi2 computer entertainment system.

Redefined for PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, Gauntlet Dark Legacy introduces a variety of fascinating characters, masterfully crafted worlds and next-generation features and includes a game design that allows four-player cooperative gameplay. Players battle through dangerous realms using exotic magical powers and weapons to vanquish hideous creatures, search for treasure, evade traps and embark on legendary quests.

‘‘Gauntlet is a classic, time-honored franchise that has been a favorite among gamers for years," said Helene Sheeler, vice president of marketing, Midway. ‘‘Gauntlet Dark Legacy builds upon the steeped Gauntlet tradition with dynamic new features and a unique cooperative-style gameplay."

Players choose from eight characters including a Jester, Sorceress, Dwarf or Knight. Each character possesses special turbo attacks and deadly combination moves for battle, along with countless magic potions, powerful weapons and magical shields. Four magical realms with power-ups, which include Ice, Town, Sky and Dream, add to a total of eight worlds that await Gauntlet Dark Legacy’s characters. Throughout each mystical realm, players must find obelisks, rune stones and countless other items, while confronted by more than 50 different enemies and challenging bosses.

Gauntlet Dark Legacy Features

* Cooperative Teamwork: Gauntlet’s four-player mode introduces an unprecedented level of cooperative gameplay for a PlayStation2 Action-Adventure game
* Role-playing Adventure: Advance characters with combat and adventure experience - bigger, badder, faster, stronger
* Numerous Characters: Eight Different Playable Characters: Warriors, Valkyries, Archers, Wizards, Jesters, Sorceresses, Dwarves and Knights Secret Characters: Over two-dozen secret characters with eight different split personalities to unlock
* Massive Gameplay Worlds: Mountain, Desert, Forest and Castle plus Ice, Town, Sky and Dream. Venture where only legends dare tread with more than 50 evil enemies, challenging evil bosses and countless potions, power-ups and secrets to uncover
* Advanced Combat: Each of the eight different characters pack unique combo moves and turbo attacks
* PlayStation2 Graphics: Masterfully crafted worlds, powered by the PlayStation2 graphics engine and the most extensive display of cinematics ever for the franchise

Japan’s Best-selling PlayStation Game Console Title Ever ’Dragon Warrior VII’ From Enix Will Hit the U.S. This Year

Enix America Inc. confirmed what has long been anticipated - that Dragon Warrior VII for the PlayStation game console will ship in North America later this year. Released in Japan as Dragon Quest VII in August 2000, the title sold more than two million copies in its first three days, and to date, has already sold more than four million units making it Japan's best-selling PlayStation game console game ever. Across all platforms, Dragon Warrior VII ranks as the third best-selling video game in Japan of all time.

''Thousands of North American fans have been asking each day if and when Enix will release this epic RPG," said Paul Handelman, president of Enix America. ''These dedicated fans have petitioned us, created elaborate fan web sites and an extensive Dragon Warrior community. We are now thrilled to tell the Dragon Warrior community that Dragon Warrior VII is riding across the Pacific in an RPG tsunami created by over four million Japanese fans."

An epic game of magnificent proportions, Dragon Warrior VII follows the adventures of the hero, his mischievous friend Prince Kiefer and the feisty Maribel who discover that their island home holds more than peace and tranquility. Solving time-traveling puzzles transports the trio back in time where they discover lost continents. Once in the past, it is imperative that they solve the mysteries of the continents in order to save the future. Accomplish this task and the world will be complete. Fail, and the lost lands and their inhabitants will be forever doomed.

Enix has upgraded the graphics of the Dragon Warrior series in Dragon Warrior VII to utilize the power of the PlayStation game console to create 3D rendered backgrounds and fluid combat animation. Fans of the series will note, however, that the depth of story and engrossing RPG experience of Dragon Warrior VII remains true to other recently released titles in the series, including the hit Dragon Warrior I & II and the forthcoming Dragon Warrior III and Dragon Warrior Monsters 2 for Game Boyfi Color.

Dragon Warrior VII was created by the masterful trio of Yuji Horii (game design), Akira Toriyama (character and monster design) and Koichi Sugiyama (music). For fans hoping to get some early insight into the game, Enix has today launched the official Dragon Warrior VII web site located at www.enix.com.

Eidos to Ship Deus Ex: Game of the Year Edition May 9

Special Version of Ion Storm's Award-winning First Person Adventure Game Available Next Month

Eidos Interactive announced that it will ship a special edition of Deus Ex -- its award-winning first-person adventure game created by Ion Storm Austin. The Deus Ex: Game Of The Year Edition will be available in stores beginning May 9th.

The Deus Ex: Game of the Year Edition features an updated version of the engaging single-player game as well as an all-new multiplayer feature. The new multiplayer feature allows each player to create and customize a character to match his or her gameplay style, providing a new kind of deathmatch experience. The Deus Ex: Game Of The Year Edition also contains a Software Development Kit that allows gamers to create new single or multiplayer missions with the same tools used by the developer. Gamers can

also create stand-alone Deus Ex missions, build 3D maps from scratch or modify existing ones. Also included is a music CD featuring over 30 of the best tracks from the soundtrack remixed for higher audio quality.

‘‘Ion Storm Austin has created a monumental game experience in Deus Ex," says Paul Baldwin, Vice President of Marketing for Eidos Interactive. ‘‘We are extremely proud to release this special edition of Deus Ex, which adds new experiences to the original, making this a must-buy for every PC gamer."

In Deus Ex, gamers play the role of J.C. Denton, a rookie anti-terrorist agent with UNATCO -- the UN Anti-Terrorist Coalition. J.C.’s a nano-technologically augmented man with remarkable abilities, and he’s charged with investigating terrorist activity in and around New York concerning a plague called the Gray Death. The plague has no cure and the only known treatment is Ambrosia, which is in short supply. J.C. has to make sure the terrorists don’t divert supplies of Ambrosia from the people who need it. But as J.C. battles the terrorists, he finds that they aren’t as bad as he’s been led to believe and he begins to question some of his orders. Everyone seems to have an agenda and J.C. must decide whom to trust. Eventually, J.C. ends up on the outs with UNATCO and is caught in the middle of a situation far bigger than he ever expected, as various figures and groups vie for nothing less than control of the world.

Deus Ex has received over 30 ‘‘Game of the Year" accolades from numerous industry and fan publications, including ‘‘Game of the Year" from PC Gamer Magazine, ‘‘Best PC Game of 2000" by the British Academy of Film & Television Arts (BAFTA), ‘‘PC Action/Adventure Game of the Year" and ‘‘PC Innovation in Computer Gaming" from The Academy of Interactive Arts and Science.

Interplay Proudly Announces Hunter: The Reckoning for Xbox; Vampire Hunters Wanted: It’s Time to Save the World

Digital Mayhem, a division of Interplay Entertainment Corp., proudly announced that Hunter: The Reckoning is currently in development for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. Hunter is a thrilling action-adventure game based on the mysterious characters and spine-tingling fiction found in the popular role-playing game Hunter: The Reckoning and the mystifying World of Darkness universe in which it is based. Developed by High Voltage Software, Inc. for Digital Mayhem using the AtlasTech Game Engine(TM) licensed technology, and based on the popular license from White Wolf Publishing, Inc., Hunter: The Reckoning is scheduled to ship Q1, 2002.

‘‘Hunter is one of those rare licenses that is perfectly tailored for gamers worldwide," said Interplay CEO Brian Fargo, ‘‘Xbox, with its advanced technology and features, is the perfect platform for this ambitious project. We are delighted to announce Hunter as our first exclusive Xbox title."

‘‘We believe High Voltage and Digital Mayhem will bring their our own brand of creativity and gaming expertise to this unique license," stated Jim Molitor, Division Director for Digital Mayhem, ‘‘With Hunter, gamers will experience the pure fun of an advanced Xbox action game while also being immersed in the rich fiction of White Wolf’s World of Darkness."

Played from a third person perspective, Hunter immerses players in the nightmarish setting of the modern day Hunter. Denizens of the night disguised as everyday mortals co-existing with other society members plague this macabre world. Players thrust into this world soon learn that they have the ability to see these creatures for what they are and are compelled to destroy them in order to save humanity from the threat of eternal darkness. Players will assume the role of one of four Hunter characters, each imbued with supernatural abilities that become more diverse and powerful as players progress through the game. Hunters are also able to find and make use of Glyphs, glowing symbols on the ground, which enhance their ability to combat the undead.

‘‘We are very pleased to be partnering with Interplay and Digital Mayhem on this extraordinary property," stated Kerry Ganofsky, Chief Executive Officer of High Voltage. ‘‘We believe our definitive efforts will result in the ultimate action-adventure experience for Xbox."

Throughout the game’s many gothic environments, including a prison execution chamber, a ghoulish cemetery, and a chilling train station, players will face down over 30 creature variants from bloodthirsty vampires to unstoppable legions of the walking dead. To help slayers battle their prey, Hunter features an arsenal of weapons including swords, shotguns, axes, and flamethrowers.

Additionally, Hunter supports cooperative four-player multiplayer. The game dynamically scales its difficulty to accommodate the number of players in the game. In cooperative mode, players will interact with one another allowing them to battle the undead and heal fellow Hunters that have fallen prey to the deadly creatures.

Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Ships Spec Ops Ranger Elite, Sequel to the Best Selling Budget Title for the PlayStation Game Console

Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. announced that Spec Ops Ranger Elite, the sequel to its hugely successful Spec Ops Stealth Patrol, has shipped and is available in stores nationwide.

Spec Ops Stealth Patrol has sold over 800,000 units, according to NPD TRST data, since its introduction in April 2000, making it the number one selling budget title for PlayStation in 2000.

The Spec Ops theme, consisting of numerous missions of a two-man team going deep undercover behind enemy lines where they encounter much peril during combat in desert and jungle warfare environments, has been a consistent top-ten seller on the PlayStation platform over the past three months.

‘‘The Spec Ops brand has been a tremendous success and we anticipate Spec Ops Ranger Elite to continue to satisfy the insatiable demand for this franchise product," said Sam Houser, Vice-President of Worldwide Development of Take-Two. ‘‘We believe that Spec Ops Ranger Elite will further solidify Take-Two’s position as a leader in budget software for the PlayStation and shows that we can develop hit products across full and value price points."

Kelly Sumner, Chief Executive Officer of Take-Two, said, ‘‘Spec Ops has shown that there is a very exciting business opportunity with a PlayStation

budget range and we expect to continue to exploit this as the PlayStation demographics evolve."

THQ Announces ‘‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles" for Game Boy Advance

THQ Inc. announced ‘‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles" for Game Boy Advance.

Based on the popular LucasArts property, ‘‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles" marks the first Game Boy Advance product announced under THQ’s multi-property publishing agreement with LucasArts. Currently in development by HotGen Studios, ‘‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles" is scheduled for worldwide release fall 2001.

‘‘As the No. 1 third-party Game Boy Color publisher, we are well positioned for success on Nintendo’s new Game Boy Advance system with 15 titles launching this year," stated Germaine Gioia, vice president of licensing, THQ. ‘‘We are delighted to be working with LucasArts in bringing ‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles’ for Game Boy Advance to millions of ‘Star Wars’ enthusiasts and gamers alike."

‘‘We look forward to ‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles’ for Game Boy Advance as an extension of the successful PlayStation and Dreamcast product launches," stated Simon Jeffery, president of LucasArts. ‘‘THQ’s proven track record in the handheld arena makes them the ideal Game Boy Advance publishing partner for LucasArts’ high-profile properties."

In ‘‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles," players can battle in single- or two-player mode with the power of the Force as they fight off legions of battle droids, destroyer droids, assassins and other familiar creatures from the ‘‘Star Wars Episode I" worlds. True to the ‘‘Star Wars" universe with authentic characters, locations and weapons, gamers fight as Obi-Wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn or Mace Windu, all powerful Jedi Knights.

Players will fight through 10 exciting levels of progressively challenging gameplay, gaining power boosts, new moves and enhanced capabilities. Players will put their Jedi skills to the test as they help protect the Galactic Republic from the greedy Trade Federation in ‘‘Star Wars Jedi Power Battles" for Game Boy Advance.

Hold On True-Believers ... Activision’s Spider-Man Makes Its Debut On Sega Dreamcast and Swings Into Retail Stores Nationwide

He ensnares super-villains with the sling of a web and now Marvel’s Spider-Man is coming to wield justice on Dreamcast with the North American launch of Activision, Inc.’s ATVI Spider-Man.

The game, which has shipped to retail stores, carries a suggested retail price of $39.99 and has been rated ‘‘E" (‘‘Everyone" -- content suitable for persons ages six and older -- with Animated Violence) by the ESRB.

The first Dreamcast free-roaming, 3D action/adventure game based on the most recognized super hero of all time, Spider-Man challenges players to web-sling, wall-crawl, fight and use ‘‘Spider-Sense" to battle evil-doers.

Gamers must utilize Spider-Man’s super strength, web-shooters and superior wit to protect the innocent as they help solve a variety of puzzles and defeat super-villains.

‘‘The enhanced graphics capabilities of Dreamcast will bring the comic book world of Spider-Man to life like never before," said Larry Goldberg, executive vice president, Activision Worldwide Studios. ‘‘From wall crawling and web-slinging to Spider-Man’s danger-detecting ’Spider-Sense,’ Dreamcast gamers will now be able to fully experience the myth and mystery of being this renowned super hero."

Spider-Man for Dreamcast features a fully-immersive, intriguing storyline that gamers can experience through 34 action-packed levels. From hair-raising police chases, all-out brawls with lizard men, stealth missions, gamers battle through familiar Spider-Man comic book locales including the Daily Bugle, Times Square and a New York bank.

Players will utilize all of the classic Spider-Man web defenses from trapping and yanking to impact webbing, as well as attacks like web dome and web spikes to battle enemies. In addition, players can swing from place-to-place, ambush enemies from above or below, crawl on buildings, ceilings, walls and use the always-handy ‘‘Spider-Sense" to detect danger from afar.

Spider-Man for Dreamcast was developed by Treyarch LLC to take full advantage of the platform’s expanded video capabilities.

Dark Cloud Emerges Onto the PlayStation2

Action-Packed Role-Playing Game Immerses Players in an Epic Adventure Of Rebirth, Revival and Renewed Hope

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced the May, 29 2001 release of Dark Cloud, a stirring, 3D action-adventure role-playing game (RPG) available exclusively for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Featuring a strong character-driven story with six playable characters, Dark Cloud takes full advantage of the power of PlayStation 2. Combining traditional exploration and battle elements with real-time strategy, world-building and puzzle-solving gameplay, Dark Cloud will take gamers by storm, delivering a graphically spectacular and truly imaginative adventure this spring.

The epic tale of Dark Cloud will captivate gamers as they undertake the role of Toan, an innocent young hero who witnesses the horrifying destruction of his world when the evil ‘‘dark cloud" is unleashed, wreaking havoc across the land. Toan awakens only to discover that the world has been plunged into darkness; he is visited by a mysterious figure known as the Sprit Emperor, who bestows him with the power to rescue the world. As the sole witness and survivor of the turmoil, Toan must bravely embark on an epic journey to rebuild the villages in the world while rescuing townspeople, battling monsters, restoring life and faith and unlocking the secrets of the land.

‘‘Dark Cloud is an incredibly compelling narrative, realistically brought to life by the technological capabilities of PlayStation 2," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America

Inc. ‘‘With its beautifully-rendered graphics, imaginative characters, strategic gameplay, real-time interactivity and powerful storyline, this creative new offering will surely fulfill the appetites of gamers looking for something refreshing and original."

Dark Cloud introduces an innovative new gameplay mechanic called ‘‘GEORAMA." This unique element enables players to create, build and customize a fully interactive, three-dimensional world, and allows them to roam immediately through their newly constructed environments, all in real-time. As Toan, gamers will travel across vast lands uncovering clues for rebuilding the villages and unlocking hidden secrets. By utilizing predetermined objects such as trees, rivers, wells, homes and staircases, as well as hundreds of other items including treasures, magic spells, keys and vehicles, players can reconstruct the lush landscapes. Each community must be recreated accurately, as this will directly influence the prosperity of the environments, triggering clues for the player and unveiling pieces of the storyline as they progress.

Variable weather and time-of-day conditions add another strategic component to developing and managing the landscape. As the time of day and the weather begin to alter, items in the environment, events and conversations are also subject to change. Certain characters may be more willing to offer assistance during the daytime, for example.

Players must pay careful attention to all of the characters they encounter on their quest, as their assistance is essential to restoring the land. Dark Cloud allows gamers to unlock six different playable characters located throughout the universe, each with their own specific abilities and unique weapons. The game features a detailed weapons system, allowing players to change and increase their weapon strength. In addition, Dark Cloud contains many different types of real-time battles, encouraging players to strategically consider their opponents’ strengths and weaknesses when planning attacks. Each playable character can also maintain up to 10 fully customizable weapons at one time.

Dark Cloud was released in Japan to critical acclaim last December. For the upcoming U.S. release, the Dark Cloud development team has enhanced the game further, adding additional content that amounts to a 30 percent larger game overall. New improvements to the U.S. edition include: a total new battle system, extra weapons, new monsters, enhanced enemy artificial intelligence (A.I), an additional event battle in which pushing the right button combinations at the right time can mean the difference between success and failure, a completely new dungeon level with one hundred extra randomly generated maps and much more.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rates Dark Cloud ‘‘T" for ‘‘Teen."

EA GAMES Creates James Bond 007 In...Agent Under Fire for the Playstation 2

Giving Bond fans a fresh new reason to cheer, EA GAMES is in development with the latest interactive entertainment title based on MGM and Danjaq’s blockbuster international superspy, James Bond. James Bond 007 in...Agent Under Fire(TM) for the PlayStationfi2 computer entertainment system will deliver a unique and complete action, stealth and driving experience that thrusts the player into the deceptive and exciting world of secret agent

007. The game will feature an all new and original single player storyline -- written exclusively for the platform -- while staying true to the Bond legacy by delivering all the furious action, stealth, whirlwind driving, state-of-the-art gadgets and sophisticated spy-craft that 007 fans crave.

As Bond, the player must defeat the evil criminal mastermind Malprave, head of a rising terrorist organization that is bent on ruling the world with their clone technology and army of clones. Helping players along the way in Agent Under Fire will be the gorgeous Zoe Nightshade and a cast of familiar characters. Each of the more than 10 exotic locations around the world will contain a generous offering of challenging, well-balanced missions and objectives.

Agent Under Fire gives players the option of blasting their way through each level using high tech weaponry, quietly relying on spy-craft tricks and state-of-the-art gadgets as well as nerve tingling stealth to accomplish mission objectives - or both. The driving levels will feature an array of 007-inspired exotic cars and automotive combat from the Bond movies. Only through the clever utilization of Q-lab weapons and gadgets along with Bond-style wit, will the player be able to thwart Malprave’s plans...and get the girl.

Key features will include:

* Engage in a completely immersive first person Bond experience built exclusively for the PlayStation 2 console.
* All new, original single player storyline that builds on the Bond legacy with villains and allies, both new and familiar.
* Three well-balanced gameplay style experiences for the single player: action, stealth and driving.
* A full arsenal of Q-lab weapons, gadgets and autos for the player to utilize.
* Fast, fluid action and spy-packed gameplay inspired by the 007 films.
* Enormous, detailed 3-D environments that can only be experienced through the eyes of Bond.
* Single and multiplayer modes support for up to four players.

Agent Under Fire will utilize next generation console technology to help bring life to the full environmental physics and detailed 3-D environments, such as a massive deep sea oil rig set atop a secret underwater base. The game will feature rich and highly detailed graphics, such as strikingly beautiful women, and the thrilling Bond moments that distinguish the 007 films from all others.

Acclaim Max Sports Announces Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 for the PlayStation 2 Computer Entertainment System, NINTENDO GAMECUBE and Xbox Video Game System from Microsoft

Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. announced that Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 is in development for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, NINTENDO GAMECUBE and the Xbox video game system is slated to ship to national retail outlets in Fall 2001. This much-anticipated sequel to the original hit game Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX is also being developed by Z-Axis.

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 is the only game to feature ten time World Champion and 11 time X Games medallist Dave Mirra, and 2000 X Games

Champion Ryan Nyquist. As in the first game, other top BMX pros will be included to round out the action.

‘‘This is a great extension of the Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX brand," said Steve Felsen, Director of Brand Management. ‘‘This raises the bar for extreme sports games of any kind as the gamer can literally create his own experience using our new custom Rider and Park editors and the hugely successful trick modifier from the first game."

In Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2, players create their own rider and choose their own sponsors. Players then complete a variety of challenges to progress through the game and earn the respect of fellow riders. The ultimate goal is to unseat Dave Mirra as the top BMX rider.

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 offers players eight new fully interactive game environments that are four times as big as those in the previous game and integrate traffic systems with moving vehicles, fellow riders and pedestrians. This franchise’s open trick system defines the word ’freestyle’. There will be 1,500+ tricks possible in the game, more than any other BMX or skateboarding game. In addition, the raucous soundtrack features new cuts by top artists. Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 features 10 multi-player games, including the Bikathalon, which gives riders the chance to muster all the multi-player games into one huge competition.

Developed by Z-Axis, Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 is shipping later this year for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, NINTENDO GAMECUBE and Xbox video game system from Microsoft.

TDK Mediactive Ships ’The Land Before Time: Great Valley Racing Adventure’ for the PlayStation Game Console

TDK Mediactive, Inc. announced that it has shipped ‘‘The Land Before Time: Great Valley Racing Adventure" for the PlayStationfi game console. The first racing game to star the popular dinosaurs from Universal Home Entertainment Productions’ best-selling animated video franchise, ‘‘Great Valley Racing Adventure" features spectacular 3D environments and compelling gameplay in an exciting, nonviolent game for young children and families alike.

‘‘We’re pleased to contribute this fun and engaging racing game to ’The Land Before Time’ franchise," said Vincent Bitetti, chief executive officer of TDK Mediactive. ‘‘’Great Valley Racing Adventure’ features the popular dinosaur characters and combines colorful race courses and weather effects to create a memorable experience. This is a game that kids will simply love."

‘‘Vision Scape Interactive has done a great job working with TDK Mediactive producer David Artuso to create a fun and competitive racing game that captures the charm and delight of ’The Land Before Time’ characters and environments," said Peter Gould, vice president of product development at TDK Mediactive. ‘‘It’s a great addition to our ’Land Before Time’ PlayStation lineup."

‘‘’The Land Before Time’ is one of our most popular and cherished franchises," said Nancy Cushing-Jones, president of publishing rights, Universal Studios Consumer Products Group. ‘‘TDK Mediactive has developed a unique and innovative interactive product that both parents and children

are sure to enjoy."

‘‘Great Valley Racing Adventure" isn’t a conventional racing game. Young dinos must gallop, jump, dodge, and use stone slabs and ice to slide through the courses, grabbing Treestar power-ups along the way. The cast of dinosaur characters includes Littlefoot, the lovable long neck apatosaurus; Cera, the bossy three-horn triceratops; Ducky, the naive duckbill swimmer saurolophus; Petrie, the comic flyer pterodactyl; and Spike the ravenous spiketail stegosaurus.

‘‘Great Valley Racing Adventure" includes the following features:

* Eight single-player obstacle courses and eight two-player racetracks.
* The ability to race against the computer or compete with a friend.
* Magnificent 3D environments.
* Weather effects add an extra visual dimension to gameplay.
* Variable skill levels suitable for younger children.

Now available nationwide, ‘‘The Land Before Time: Great Valley Racing Adventure" is rated E for Everybody and retails at $19.99.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Congress Mulls Internet Sales Tax

Congress must soon decide whether to keep the Internet a largely tax-free shopping zone or pave the way for states to collect sales taxes on most online purchases.

There is little doubt lawmakers will extend a moratorium expiring this October that bars taxes on Internet access and prohibits taxes that single out the Internet. The bigger question: What do to about sales taxes? While laws in 45 states say those taxes are owed, they rarely are collected.

At stake are billions of dollars in revenue for state and local governments as well as tax fairness between traditional brick-and-mortar retailers and their Internet and catalog competitors.

Congress’ General Accounting Office has estimated that uncollected sales taxes on Internet purchases could cost the states $12.5 billion in 2003. Remote sellers, meanwhile, say complying with thousands of different taxing jurisdictions would create a costly new burden - and could lead to imposition of more taxes in the future.

‘‘This is a complicated and controversial issue," said Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., sponsor of a bill providing a way for states to eventually collect Internet sales taxes. ‘‘It’s a tax that is already owed. The question is how you work it out so the consumer can more easily pay it."

The taxes are not collected now mainly because of the Supreme Court, which has ruled that a business must have a physical presence - such as a warehouse, a retail store or an executive office - before a state can require sales tax collections on out-of-state purchases. Few states have tried to force their citizens to pay the tax from remote sales on their own.

In the Senate, negotiators have tentatively agreed on an extension of the moratorium through 2006. The measure would also expand states' sales tax collection authority, but only if at least 25 states simplify their own multiple tax rates. Congress would still have to give final approval to the new system.

''What we're working on is if a state is allowed to do this, there would be one rate," said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., sponsor of one leading bill. ''I think you can do a lot of harm to e-commerce by setting up a maze of taxes."

The Senate Commerce Committee is scheduled to consider Internet tax legislation as early as Thursday. ''I think we're very close to agreement," said Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the committee chairman.

Some 32 states are in formal discussions at developing a streamlined sales tax collection system, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. In 25 states, legislation has been introduced to simplify tax rates in anticipation of congressional permission to collect the taxes.

Vice President Dick Cheney recently endorsed extension of the moratorium on Internet access taxes and taxes that single out the Internet, but the Bush administration is taking a cautious stance on sales taxes.

''The groups are working passionately to reach a compromise, and we are encouraging it and monitoring it," said Mark Weinberger, assistant Treasury secretary for tax policy.

A coalition of retailers and shopping centers, including Wal-Mart, is lobbying for sales taxes to apply equally to all sales. Many Internet businesses are much more willing than in the past to accept such a system, as long as the compliance burdens are not too great.

''It's the biggest sea change of the debate," said Jeffrey Friedman, partner on electronic tax issues at the KPMG accounting and consulting firm. ''At one time, the idea of states extending their reach was a nonstarter."

But there are fears among some that once states get the authority to collect sales taxes, which would grant new audit authority, some could attempt to impose license fees, corporate income taxes or franchise taxes on business activity.

''It puts business in the middle of revenue grabs between the various states," said Mark Nebergall of the Software Finance and Tax Executives Council.

Some lawmakers view new state collection powers as essentially a tax increase, which would face an especially tough road in the Republican-led House.

Rep. Billy Tauzin, chairman of the House Commerce Committee, said he does not sense ''any will in the political gut" to tackle the issue of state

sales taxes, but agrees the states should be given a chance to prove their case.

‘‘I think people would like to keep this thing on the burners so states are encouraged to work this out," said Tauzin, R-La. ‘‘I really don’t see us doing much more than extending the current law."

Is Internet Privacy an Oxymoron?

Outgoing Yahoo! chief executive officer Tim Koogle might not have thought that Internet privacy was a contradiction in terms. But that was before he was "outed" by The Washington Post for using a screen name to participate in auctions -- on eBay.

Now this story has many interesting threads, starting with what the heck is the CEO of a direct competitor doing bidding and buying on eBay? (The adjunct question might be, how long until eBay uses this fact in a commercial?)

There’s also the question of timing. Apparently, Koogle was in a shopping mood shortly after stepping down from the helm at Yahoo! -- causing a seven-hour trading halt in the process -- because on that day, he bought a US$130,000 Aston Martin and a Versace wallet, according to the Post.

But what’s most interesting is Koogle’s response to the revelation that he was the man behind the "Virginiadude" screen name. Specifically, the Post said that Koogle replied in part: "I don’t appreciate this invasion of privacy."

Welcome to the Internet, Tim.

The fact is that Koogle, like everyone on the Internet, was lulled into a false sense of security and privacy. A fake screen name seems like just the trick to shop, visit scandalous sites, even send e-mails to all sorts of people -- anonymously.

But it’s simply not real privacy. Any enterprising investigator can dig back to the original source and find out the truth.

It’s easy to forget that, though. We read message boards where everyone has a screen name: some outlandish, some barely scrambled versions of their real names.

In fact, some people don’t even bother covering their tracks anymore, either due to boldness, a false sense of security or just plain laziness.

I recently covered a story about layoffs at a provider of online 401(k) programs. The tip was sent via an unsigned e-mail, but the e-mail signature bore the name of a competitor of the downsizing company. A quick check of the management profiles revealed just who had sent the tip.

Most of the time, though, our Web identities are shielded as a matter of practicality. In a corporate setting, there is comfort in numbers: Who has the time to screen the millions of e-mails bouncing around the server, even if many of them are personal in nature or bawdy in content and therefore against the rules?

But Koogle got a reminder and we should all take it to heart. In fact, his lesson was learned fairly cheaply. While a potential embarrassment to Yahoo!, it got little attention -- perhaps even because of his pleas for privacy.

The fact is that everyone wants to believe in online privacy, but so far it’s like believing in Santa Claus. After all, what solid proof do we have that online privacy exists?

The Toysmart situation was supposed to be a turning point. But destruction of the failed e-tailer’s customer list did not ease privacy concerns. Instead, the opposite has happened. Dot-coms have gone about changing their privacy policies to specifically say that once a company or a division is sold or merged, all bets are off. In other words, e-tailers are reserving the right to sell our names, e-mail addresses and shopping histories.

Anyone with an e-mail address knows that someone out there is selling your information to the highest bidder -- and there appear to be many sellers and buyers. So why should we continue to believe in online privacy?

And yet we do. And we continue to be surprised when policies are changed, either to erode protections or slip in clauses that preserve the status quo that personal data is a commodity.

As long as we blindly believe the myth that all is well on the Interent privacy front, there won’t be any changes to make it a reality.

Napster Replaces Apology with Warning

Last week Napster apologized to its users for "overblocking" -- preventing songs not covered by the music industry’s copyright infringement lawsuit from being traded. After a favorable court ruling on Friday, however, the file-swapping company appears to be easing some of its filtering efforts.

The apology was replaced over the weekend by a stern warning to users that those who attempt to subvert the file filtering mechanism would be summarily excluded from the service.

"Clearly it’s filtering far more than their previous efforts -- in fact, more than they intended," Webnoize analyst Ric Dube told NewsFactor Network.

Dealing Napster a minor, if temporary, victory on Friday, U.S. District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel told the record industry plaintiffs that they must not only supply Napster with the artists and song-titles they believe are being illegally shared on Napster, but also at least one Napster file name.

The decision greatly increased the burden on the record companies, and observers say it will allow Napster to breathe a little easier.

As a result of Patel’s ruling, Napster is "scaling back" its recently invigorated filters, said Dube, who covers the digital music industry for Webnoize.

Patel suggested the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) could

go back to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals if it doesn't agree with her reading of the Appeals Court's most recent ruling on the requirements.

Patel also rejected the RIAA's request for stricter remedies against Napster, saying she'd wait until hearing a report by A.J. Nichols, the technology expert she assigned to evaluate how well the filters are working.

Earlier this month, Patel chastised Napster, calling its filtering efforts to date "disgraceful."

Perhaps in anticipation of its next appearance in front of Patel, Napster had implemented much more powerful filters last week. The apology for over-blocking was taken down over the weekend, however.

It was replaced with a message stating that the company's latest filtering efforts attempt to "screen out the wide range of variations in artist name and song title that result in noticed works continuing to appear on the Napster index."

And, while many of the variations are a result of individual users naming their files, Napster specifically warned those trying to subvert its filters by using "Pig Latin" or other evasive measures.

"Users found to be employing such evasive techniques will receive a warning, and those who continue to share such files will be blocked from using the Napster service," the company warned.

Napster began filtering songs after Judge Patel ordered the company to do so in March. But the use of Pig Latin and other coding and decoding schemes had made the company's efforts to comply with the court order a monumental task.

As of Thursday, Napster said it was blocking 1.75 million files, according to published reports.

The California-based Napster is attempting to maintain its user base, while complying with the court's orders, in anticipation of the launch of its paid download service this summer.

The Napster case has fueled a flurry of activity in the Internet music world, with the announcement of several new ventures by music industry players that will offer legal music downloads on a subscription basis.

Judge: Labels Wrong on Napster

A federal judge said the record industry has misinterpreted a key appellate ruling in the case against Napster Inc., and must do more to help the file-swapping service prevent millions of music fans from trading copyright songs.

U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel's memorandum effectively means that for now, Napster's interpretation holds - that the record labels must identify at least one infringing file on the ever-changing network before Napster is obligated to remove copies of the song.

Napster says it has been doing the best it can to remove any infringing

songs brought to its attention, but this has proved exceptionally difficult, since Napster users constantly make them reappear under different names. This week, Napster began using even stronger screening technology in an attempt to comply with court orders that copyright material be removed.

Patel has described Napster as an out-of-control ‘‘monster" that should be shut down if the company can’t make its filters work. But her memorandum Friday notes that it remains the record labels’ burden as well as Napster’s to identify specific infringing song files.

Patel invited the Recording Industry Association of America to ‘‘seek clarification in the court of appeals" if it disagrees with her legal analysis.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Patel’s July order that Napster remove all copyrighted works from its file-swapping site, but with several key caveats. The appellate court said the record industry trade group must ‘‘provide notice to Napster of copyrighted works and files containing such works available on the Napster system before Napster has the duty to disable access to the offending content."

Patel ruled Friday that the record labels’ interpretation, that they need only tell Napster to remove a song by a specific artist - that they don’t have to identify any infringing files - ‘‘requires reading more into the paragraph than the Ninth Circuit has made apparent."

Napster’s interpretation: as well as the artist and title, it needs at least one file name showing that the song is actually being traded. Otherwise, Napster must search for hundreds of thousands of variations of artist and title combinations that may not be on the network in the first place.

‘‘It is the only way that we can maximize the effectiveness of the filtering of noticed works that are actually on the system," Napster attorney Robert Silver said.

A recording industry spokeswoman sought to downplay Patel’s analysis. ‘‘Napster still needs to comply with the order," said Amy Weiss.

As of Thursday, Napster said it was blocking 1.75 million possible combinations of artist-and-title names and variants. Napster has made it impossible to search for many titles in the first place, effectively blocking 85 percent of the songs users try to trade. On Thursday alone, the filters screened out 1.6 billion files, the company said.

Patel invited both sides to submit more guidance on how Napster might prevent newly released songs from appearing on the site, and noted that her own ‘‘neutral technology advisor," A.J. Nichols, is studying the technological issues in the case.

‘‘The court will reserve making any findings regarding the relevant technology until it has reviewed Dr. Nichols’ report," she said.

Microsoft Declares War on ’Free Software’ Model

Microsoft on Thursday declared war on the Linux operating system and other

rival software that share their basic instruction codes with the public, saying the ‘‘free software" movement poses a fundamental threat to commercial intellectual property rights.

Craig Mundie, senior vice president of the world’s largest software company, blasted the open source philosophy as impractical for businesses like Microsoft in a major address at New York University, and pushed Microsoft’s own more limited "Shared Source" partnering approach.

‘‘Fundamentally, the thing that informs our choice is this belief in protecting our intellectual property," Mundie said. "The really big difference is there’s not as much focus (in open source models)...that you have to make a business out of this."

Open source, with roots in scientific and academic information sharing, is a software industry tradition through which source code -- the underlying instructions of a program -- is made freely available for use or modification by developers. No one claims ownership or holds a copyright.

The philosophy, which became a commercial phenomenon in the 1990s as a popular way of building software to manage Web sites, is seen as a major alternative to Microsoft’s careful guarding of its source code Windows as a trade secret.

In recent months, Microsoft executives have turned up the heat against the open source philosophy. On Thursday, Mundie introduced Shared Source as Microsoft’s rival strategy.

Microsoft gives developers access to its crown jewels, the Windows operating system source code, so they can develop new products or fix glitches. But the company retains ownership of the software code as its intellectual property.

Mundie’s speech, heralded as a major position statement, blasted the open source movement using more forceful language than the typically ambiguous, jargon-filled phrasings of a software executive.

He described the open software movement as ‘‘flimsy," "flawed," jeopardizing property rights and threatening to undermine the software industry, a key economic growth engine.

‘‘We recognize that Open Source Software (OSS) has some benefits such as the fostering of community, improved feedback... and debugging," Mundie said. ‘‘But there are significant drawbacks to OSS as well."

Open source software creates greater dangers of security risks, software instability and incompatibility and could force valuable corporate intellectual property into public hands, Mundie said.

In recent years, open source development has captured the imagination of millions of programmers across the globe as a new way of working outside the orbit of Microsoft, which had previously dominated computer software design.

Spearheading the development of Linux, the best known of the open source software systems, were companies such as Red Hat Inc., VA Linux and Caldera Systems Inc.

Since 1999, International Business Machines Corp., the world’s biggest computer company, has thrown considerable financial backing behind open

source software. Other top computer hardware and software makers have joined in.

By contrast, Microsoft has considered open source as a challenge to its way of doing business. The company identified it as a major threat to its business during the federal trial where it was found guilty last year of antitrust violations.

Mundie took aim at the General Public License, a basic agreement under which open source software is distributed.

He likened the GPL, which rejects traditional copyright in favor of open sharing of any software design changes, to failed dot-com business models of the past.

‘‘(Supporters of the GPL) ask software developers to give away for free the very thing they create that is of greatest value, in the hope that, somehow, they’ll make money selling something else," Mundie said.

Open source programmers typically rely on selling custom programming or consulting services rather than selling software licenses.

Mundie said Microsoft has made its source code available since 1991, first to academic institutions, then to close hardware partners and more recently to major corporate customers. More than 5 million programmers now have access to Microsoft’s underlying code, he said.

Mundie said that Microsoft would be expanding its Shared Source effort to additional countries and to independent software companies in the coming months.

Brad Kuhn, vice president of the Free Software Foundation, the group behind the General Public License, said Microsoft was trying to confuse the difference between commercial software and proprietary software controlled by one company.

Kuhn said Microsoft pays lip service to the open source philosophy in order to tap the energies of a wide network of programmers but uses those efforts to create software that it alone owns and controls.

‘‘They’re trying to trick the issue and change it," Kuhn said.

Ken Wasch, president of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), a Washington D.C.-based trade group that has been highly critical of Microsoft’s business practices, said Microsoft was trying to incite fear among businesses considering using open source software to run key operations.

‘‘It is safe to say that Microsoft shares certain, but not all, (programming code) and only does so when it is in the best interests of the company, not in the interest of dynamic innovation within the industry."

Microsoft Names, Delays Windows 2002

Microsoft has gone back to the calendar to name the upcoming server version of Windows--but the company has given itself six more months to get the product out the door.

Microsoft announced Monday that it has chosen the name "Windows 2002" for the operating system that will supplant Windows 2000 Server, Advanced Server and Datacenter--the versions that run the powerful networked computers called servers. Windows 2002's close cousin, Windows XP, is intended for use on desktops, laptops and workstations and is the first of the products Microsoft based on the software code-named Whistler.

Using "2002" carries on a date-oriented naming tradition that began with Windows 95 but that Microsoft veered away from for its upcoming Windows XP, short for "experience."

But Windows 2002 likely will arrive later than hoped--possibly by the end of 2001, a spokeswoman for Microsoft said, but more likely in the first half of 2002.

Last October, Microsoft said in a statement that versions of Whistler--now known as Window XP and Windows 2002--"are expected to be generally available in the second half of 2001."

The delay carries on a tradition of delayed operating system releases that has plagued Microsoft as well as its competitors.

"If there have been any major releases of a Windows operating system that have shipped on time, I am not aware of them," said Robert Francis Group analyst Michael Dortch. "Any information technology executive with more than four months' experience has probably already planned for this."

The Whistler versions of Windows are key for Microsoft as it tries to create software that's less crash-prone.

For the first time, nearly all its operating systems will be spawned from the same code base--even "embedded" versions for devices such as video poker machines or set-top boxes. Only Windows CE for portable devices such as handheld computers comes from a separate lineage.

Currently, Microsoft's position is more complicated. Windows Millennium Edition for home users is based on the lineage that led through DOS to Windows 3.1, Windows 95 and Windows 98. On the other hand, Windows 2000 for servers and business desktop computers is an extension of the Windows NT lineage.

Windows XP will be the first home computer product to be based on Windows NT.

For Windows 2002, Microsoft decided to stick with the calendar-based naming convention because of its familiarity to corporate computing personnel. "It seems prudent to continue with a similar naming paradigm," Bob O'Brien, group product manager for the Windows .Net server marketing program, said in a statement.

The slipped schedule is in response to comments from customers, Microsoft said. "Microsoft is very focused on listening to customer feedback, and feels strongly about not shipping the product until customers tell them they are ready," a spokeswoman said.

One of the major features coming with Windows 2002 is easier use of Active Directory, a Microsoft feature that keeps track of computers across company networks and what they can do, said Summit Strategies analyst Dwight Davis. A delay might hold up adoption of this feature, but

otherwise is unlikely to affect Microsoft too much, he said.

"It’s not as significant a release relative to Windows 2000 as Windows 2000 was to Windows NT," Davis said. The step is more minor--more like the step from Windows 95 to Windows 98.

Microsoft said Monday that Windows XP will include a version designed for Intel’s upcoming 64-bit CPUs, the first of which is named Itanium and is due to arrive in computers by the end of June.

IBM Says Developed Technology for Producing Smaller, Faster Computer Chips

International Business Machines Corp said it has developed new transistor technology that could enable production of a new class of smaller, faster and lower-power computer chips than currently possible with silicon. IBM said its researchers have built the world’s first array of transistors out of carbon nanotubes -- tiny cylinders of carbon atoms that are 500 times smaller than today’s silicon-based transistors.

"This achievement is an important step in finding new materials and processes for improving computer chips after silicon-based chips cannot be made any smaller -- a problem chip makers are expected to face in about 10-20 years," it said.

It went on to say that studies its researchers have carried out prove that carbon nanotubes can compete with silicon in terms of performance.

Mac User Group Events Coming to Macworld New York

Apple’s User Group Advisory Board, in association with Macworld Expo, is offering special discounts and free registration to Mac user group (MUG) members for this summer’s Macworld Expo in New York.

The board is a group of leaders who run successful user groups in their communities. The group is chartered with providing feedback and advice to Apple on issues related to User Group Program.

Regarding Macworld New York, Mac User Group members can register for a free Exhibits Only pass (a US$29 value). They can also get 15 percent (about $194) off a Conference Package by using the User Group Priority Code. The priority code for both offers can be obtained from an Apple authorized Macintosh User Group leader.

The User Group Advisory Board is also encouraging user group members to attend User Group University New York, a one day conference for Apple user group leaders. A third User Group Breakfast has been added to the Macworld New York event schedule. Finally, special room rates are available at The New Yorker hotel for MUG members. You can get details on all these events and offers at the MUG Center Web site.

MUGs are good places for making new friends, finding Mac-loving buddies, boning up your technical expertise, finding solutions to technical problems, and sometimes finding a good deal on used hardware. For more info

on MUGs, and to find the location of the one nearest you, go to Apple's User Group Web page.

MWNY 2001 will run July 17-20 at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York. You can register by June 18 to save up to $150 on the on-site registration prices. For complete pricing and registration info, go to the show's registration site.

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